



## 77: What Makes You Different by cali-chan

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**Summary:** "I wish you could see yourself like I see you," he breathed out almost subconsciously. "Because then... you'd know." Romance/HC/friendship, post-S2, Mike/Eleven. Rated for language.

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**What Makes You Different.** PG-13, romance/HC/friendship, post-S2, Mike/Eleven. Rated for language.

*"I wish you could see yourself like I see you," he breathed out almost subconsciously. "Because then... you'd know."*

**WARNING:** This is so damn sweet, IT MIGHT ACTUALLY KILL YOU. You thought you'd seen schmoop, folks, but you ain't seen nothin' yet...

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Mike was just finishing his french fries when he caught sight of the time on his calculator wristwatch and realized there were only 10 minutes left in their lunch period, yet Eleven had still not made an appearance. "Hey, does anyone know where El is?"

Dustin, who was sitting directly in front of him, paused halfway through raising his tuna sandwich to his mouth. "Aren't you the one who's supposed to know that?" he asked, before taking a bite of his lunch.

Mike glared at him for a moment before explaining. "I know she had English last period, but I figured she'd be here by now. You know she's not usually late for lunch." He frowned as he looked around the Hawkins High cafeteria, searching for the familiar head of brown curls. "None of you have heard from her?"

"Maybe she stayed after class to ask a question?" Will suggested from his seat to the right of Dustin, also nearly done with his own PB&J.

"For English, though?" Max, sitting on Dustin's other side, pointed out before continuing to twist the tab on her Coke can, muttering the letters of the alphabet along with each twist until the tab broke off. She looked at it with a frown. "P?" she questioned the little piece of metal in her hand, but by that point Mike wasn't really following.

"Not to mention," Lucas added from his seat beside Mike as he unpeeled the last bit of the neon-green Fruit Roll-Up he'd snuck from home without his mother noticing, "it's been half an hour. What kind of school question takes *that* long?"

Mike sure couldn't think of any. While El was doing fairly well in her first year of school, she was better in some subjects than in others. Math came easy to her, because you just had to learn the rules and you'd be fine, and she was good at remembering the rules. The science classes, well, she had the boys to tutor her in those, so she got by okay. History she actually loved, because she loved learning about people and events that had happened in the past. Similarly with Geography, she really liked learning about new places and just how big the world really was. She thought Art class was really fun. She was actually better at PE than everyone else in the party, except for Max.

English, however, was the hardest class for her. Her vocabulary, while much better than it had been when they first met, was still pretty limited, and sometimes she had trouble with reading comprehension simply because of her limited life experience. She was putting in a lot of effort to get a good grade in that class. So Mike could maybe see there were certain circumstances where she would stay after class to talk to the teacher, but not for this long, and he would've thought she would let at least one of them know ahead of time. That was the weirdest part, for him.

"You think maybe something's wrong?" Will asked, now starting to look a little concerned.

"I think if something bad had happened we would've heard about it by now?" Lucas suggested, falling back on logic. "Bad news travels fast."

"I guess so," Mike admitted, telling himself that any sort of weirdness would've been noticed by the students and it would probably have made its way to their ears by then. But he couldn't help but worry; there may still be people out there who wanted to trap or hurt her. "I still wanna make sure. I'll go check," he declared as he stood up, leaving the last few of his fries untouched.

"Wait, wait," Dustin stopped him as he was picking up his tray. "We'll cover more ground if we split up. Do you know which room her English class was in?"

"Thirty-three," Mike told him straight away. His Honors Biology class was nearby, so sometimes he walked her to English. (To be fair, most days he walked her to just about every other class, too).

"Right," Dustin said, before shoving the last quarter of his sandwich into his mouth. When he couldn't swallow it dry, he grabbed Max's Coke and took a large gulp. "Sorry. Emergency," he added in response to her protests, half-masticated ball of tuna sandwich still partially in his mouth.

"You're so gross," Max retorted with a shake of her head.

"So," he continued once the tuna finally made his way down his esophagus, "you go east, Mike; Will, take north; Lucas, take west; I'll take the back, and Max— can you maybe check the girls' bathrooms? Just in case she's sick or something, I guess."

They all agreed to meet up at Mike's locker right before the bell rang.

Mike headed straight for El's English classroom, but found it empty—even the teacher was gone. He tried not to let it make him even more anxious, moving on to the nearby classrooms, the A/V room, even the boys' bathrooms, just in case. By that point it was impossible to ignore the dread sedimenting in the pit of his stomach.

Where could she be? Did she have to study or finish an assignment and had decided to use her lunch period to do that? Did she maybe want to avoid being around the group because they might distract her? Usually she still joined them in the cafeteria when she had work to catch up on, even if she was more focused on her books than on their conversation. Had she felt sick and called Hopper to take her home? She didn't seem like she was feeling ill earlier, and if that was it, he still felt like she would've at least told someone.

It's not like he *had* to know where she was at all times. His friends sometimes warned him about coddling her too much, but he was very aware he wasn't her keeper. She was her own person, and she could

do what she wanted, say what she wanted, and come and go as she wanted. He knew that. It's not like she told him about every little thing that happened in her life.

But she was usually very open with her friends, and came to them with her questions and doubts about navigating the world of public school which was so brand new to her. It seemed out of character for her to just disappear without letting someone know. It didn't have to be him, but at least one of the others.

And he cared about her so much, he just... he worried. He couldn't help it.

He stopped to ask one of the janitors, who happened to be cleaning a trophy case in one of the hallways in Mike's designated area, if he'd seen a girl that would fit El's description walk by at the beginning of the period. That's when Lucas popped his head around the corner. "Mike!" he called out, a little winded, and a lot spooked. "Track field bleachers," he added, and Mike was running in that direction before he'd even finished saying the words.

He hurriedly made his way to the back of the school and out the back door as most people were going in the opposite direction in preparation for the start of the next period, but in his haste, he hardly noticed. He might've knocked Bobby Hasting's carton of chocolate milk out of his hands when he bumped into him as he ran out the door. He didn't really care.

When he finally crossed the sports field and rounded the side of the bleachers, he first caught sight of Dustin, standing by one of the tallest I-beams at the back of the structure, hands at his waist. Max was kneeling near his feet, blocking his view of someone sitting on the concrete against the flange of the I-beam. The redhead was stroking the person's hair with one hand, and he could see her moving her head, so she was probably saying something he couldn't hear. He couldn't see the other person's face, but he recognized those white Converse high-tops.

"El?" the question escaped his mouth without him even willing it, and at the sound, both Dustin and Max turned their heads toward him. So did Eleven, but her reaction was slower. When she lifted her head to

look at him, his heart stopped for a second... for all the wrong reasons: she was crying— her eyes red, her nose runny and her cheeks glistening from the tears relentlessly pouring down her face.

His pace sped up almost automatically to match the accelerated beating of his heart. "What's wrong?" he asked as he reached the group, kneeling opposite Max beside Eleven, Dustin taking a couple of steps back to give him enough space. Eleven wouldn't look at him, wouldn't say anything, just sniffled, and he turned desperately to Max. "What happened?"

Max shrugged, with wide eyes and a despondent shake of her head. Mike rearranged his position so he was sitting rather than kneeling— his mother might have a stoke if he got his jeans dirty, but at the moment he didn't give a fuck— and tried again with Eleven. "El, what is it? Did someone do something to you?"

Once again, she didn't respond. Instead, her face crumbled and a fresh wave of tears started pouring. She hid her head behind her knees again, sobs making her shoulders shake.

Okay, now he was *really* scared.

Max pushed herself to her feet and crossed her arms, biting her lower lip anxiously as she let Mike take the lead. He scooted closer so he could wrap an arm around Eleven. "El, come on," he pleaded with her to say something, anything, so he could find a way to help. Seeing her this distraught and being unable to do anything to make her feel better was making his stomach churn painfully.

He heard people approaching and looked briefly away from El to see Lucas and Will running up to them. Will sidled up to Dustin. "What's going on?" he asked, worry tinging his voice.

Dustin shook his head. "She won't say," he replied, about equally concerned. Mike felt a strong wave of affection for his friends. They all loved El, and it bothered them all to see her like this. When one party member was hurting, they all hurt.

"El," he tried again, rubbing her shoulder gently in what he hoped was a comforting manner. "Please. Whatever it is, we'll figure out

how to deal with it. I promise. But you have to tell me what's wrong," he pleaded again. "We want to help."

She didn't say anything for a heartbeat, and Mike thought he wasn't going to be able to get the story out of her. But then she lifted her head from her knees again only to hide it quickly against Mike's shoulder. Okay, that was good; she still wasn't saying much, but it was some kinda progress.

She sobbed into the fabric of his t-shirt for a little longer, with him running his hands through her hair and whispering soothing words into her ear as their friends watched, standing patiently around them in a semicircle.

Eventually, though, her sobs started slowing down and she pulled back just enough to wipe the tears from her lips. She kept her forehead against Mike's shoulder. "What is it, El?" he asked gently, hoping this time she would open up.

She pursed her lips for a moment and drew in a shaky breath before declaring, "I'm *stupid*," her words shaking with emotion.

At first, Mike didn't understand what she meant. "Why do you say that? Did you do something wrong? I'm sure it wasn't that bad."

"No," she retorted, shaking her head even though she was still leaning against him. "I'm *stupid*. I don't *know* things." The words were forceful, like she was frustrated with herself. She started to cry all over again.

Mike frowned, and out of the corner of his eye he saw all his friends do the same, almost in unison. They were all immediately offended for her. "El, that is *not* true," Mike assured her, earnest.

"Not even in the slightest," Dustin added, with Will nodding emphatically beside him.

"You're smart in a different way," Lucas offered sincerely.

"Did someone tell you that?" Max questioned, her expression hard, like she was itching to get her hands on Steve's nail-bat and take a good, wide swing at something. Or rather at *someone*.



El wiped tears from her cheeks again and then, apparently resigned that she was going to have to explain now that she'd said something, pulled away from Mike's shoulder and sat up straight. "In— in English class," she started, every other word interrupted by hiccups. "We have to do a report—" She sniffled. "—About *The Old Man and the Sea*. Ms. Sanders chose the pairs, and Stacey—" Another sob. "—When she heard she had to work with me, she got angry and asked Ms. Sanders if s-she could switch p-partners."

Her speech was becoming more labored as she remembered the episode. "She said it w-wasn't fair to pair her with me be-because—" More sobbing. "Because I'm stupid and I can barely r-read. And s-she said—" She drew in a ragged breath before continuing, "—She said I w-was as d-dumb as— as a bag of bricks—" The dam broke again as she finished speaking, sobs overtaking her partial composure as she hid her face behind her knees once more.

There was a moment of almost complete silence as they all let everything she had just said sink in... and then all four boys started speaking at once.

"That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard—"

"El, that's not true! You're really, *really* smart—"

"Well, who the fuck died and made her Carl fucking Sagan—"

"Look who's talking! The only thing she'll read are those dumb teen magazines—"

"Does anyone know which class Stacey's supposed to have this period?" Max asked over the chaos of everyone talking over each other. Her tone was so cold that it effectively stopped all their babbling as they turned to look at her.

Lucas shrugged and Will shook his head, but Dustin had an answer. "I'm pretty sure she's got PE right now. I can usually see them from the window during Geography when they walk out to the track." He noticed Will and Lucas were giving him odd looks. "What? It's for educational purposes," he defended himself. Lucas rolled his eyes and Will shook his head again, this time in disbelief.

That quick tangent was enough for them to momentarily miss Max spinning on her heels and starting to walk away from the bleachers—but only for a second. "I'm going to fucking punch her *so hard* in her stupid Cyndi Lauper-wannabe face..." she muttered between her teeth, her hands clenched into fists at her sides as she walked, but they all heard her very clearly.

"Shit. She's gonna land herself in detention," Lucas worried, immediately starting to run after her.

"Detention? I'm more afraid she's going to land herself in *jail* when she kills Stacey with her bare hands!" Dustin retorted, hurrying after him for extra backup. Hell hath no fury like Max Mayfield defending her friends. They knew that from experience.

Will watched them go before turning back to Mike and Eleven just as Mike was pulling her to him again. She went willingly, burying her face against his neck while her hands clung to his t-shirt. She was still sobbing lightly.

"I can't believe you have to deal with all that bullshit," Mike muttered to her as he wrapped his arms around her shoulders, holding her protectively. He was so angry, he could barely see straight. He couldn't be like Max or Hopper and just get right in the face of anyone who hurt El and threaten to punch them, but God, he wanted to. He wanted to be that person *so badly* right then.

But he knew her emotional distress was more pressing than his urge to hit back, and the most important thing he could do at the moment was to make her feel better. So that's what he would do. He was going to do everything in his power to make sure she knew each of those hurtful words was a lie. But first, he had to get her to calm down, and that included getting her as far away from her tormentor as possible. "Do you want to go home?" She nodded against his neck.

"I'll go call Hopper," Will offered right away.

Mike nodded at him. "Thanks, Will," he said, grateful, before his friend took off in the opposite direction Max, Lucas, and Dustin had gone on, toward the payphone by the main entrance of the school. Belatedly the thought crossed his mind that he should've offered Will

some change for the call, but it was too late for that now.

The two of them stayed there for a while, sitting on the lower flange of the I-beam. It took a couple of minutes for Eleven's crying to start winding down again, and when she could talk without sobbing too much, she spoke. "I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for? None of this is your fault," he assured her, still running a hand through her hair, even though she was already noticeably calmer. He just really liked touching her hair— it was soft and now that it was longer the curls were slightly looser, and he loved how they felt against his fingers. He couldn't believe he was lucky enough that she let him hold her this way.

"I made you worry," she admitted in a small voice, as if that was a terrible thing.

Mike chuckled. "I worry because I care about you. There's nothing you could do to change that, even if you wanted to." He pulled his arms back from around her shoulder so he could hold her lightly by her bent elbows. "Hey," he started, "can you look at me? Please?"

It took her a second but she relented, wiping tears from her face as she sat back. He had to let go of his embrace as she moved out of his arms, but he held on to her hands, not willing to separate from her completely. A few strands of hair were clinging to her wet cheeks and he delicately tucked them behind her ears.

He pursed his lips for a moment before speaking. "You know none of what she said is true, right? You are *not* dumb. Stacey's just an asshole who gets off on making other people feel like shit. She doesn't even know you."

"But I'm not like the rest of you," she replied, lips trembling ever-so-slightly, eyes still watery. He hated that some conceited queen bee had cut her this deeply. It wasn't fair. She didn't deserve it; she was new to all of this.

He couldn't help a frown. "What, because we get mostly A's?" He shook his head, determined to help her understand. "Grades aren't everything, El. You're still one of the smartest people I know."

Now she was frowning. "Friends don't lie," she reminded him, wary. She'd never doubted him before, but this time, it was as if she simply couldn't believe his words. As if she didn't know how to.

"I know," he asserted immediately, not stopping even for a moment to think about it. "That's how you know I mean it." He wanted to make it absolutely clear to her that this was something he believed wholeheartedly. "Look," he added, squeezing her hands in an encouraging manner. "It's true that we know a lot of stuff you don't know. We've had *fifteen years* to learn all of it. But you've learned so much, too, and you did all of that in just a couple of years. Do you know how difficult that is?"

She didn't seem entirely convinced, but the hopeful look in her eyes told him she was receptive, so he kept talking. "You've learned enough to be in the same grade as us, fair and square. Nobody did you any favors. You studied your butt off and learned so many things really fast, and you passed all your tests and completed all your requirements. I don't think there are that many kids at this school who could do that."

He squeezed her hands again. "And even then, your grades are not bad at all," he insisted, because he'd seen the graded tests she'd showed him proudly after he had tutored her in more than one class. "All of that tells me that you're really, *really* smart. Maybe smarter than all of us. We just had a head start."

She shook her head. "I'm not smarter than you."

He shrugged, but smiled. "Who knows. Maybe we're just smart at different things," he conceded, because it wasn't really important anyway. He intertwined his fingers with hers. "What I need you to really understand, El, is that none of that matters. It doesn't matter to me, it doesn't matter to Hopper, it doesn't matter to the guys, or Max, or anybody who cares about you. We don't like you because of your grades, or because of how much stuff you know. We like you because you're *you*. And anybody who doesn't, doesn't matter."

This was a lesson that every nerd, every freak, every misfit, every loner had to learn the hard way at some point through their years of schooling. It definitely took Mike a long time to internalize that he

had to tune out the bullies and the jerks— and even then, sometimes he couldn't. Words could hurt, sometimes more than fists did, and everybody had their own insecurities. It wasn't easy, being different. But he took solace in the fact that the people who really cared about him embraced and supported those differences, or at least they tried to.

Eleven had spent her entire childhood being treated as less than human. The aspects of her that made her different had caused her to be manipulated, used and abused. She would have a much harder time than any of them coming to grips with her insecurities and internalizing that lesson. But if Mike had to remind her of it every day, he would. Because he couldn't stand seeing her hurt.

He looked her straight in the eye, and asked, "Do you believe me when I say that?"

Once again she took a moment to process the information she was given, but eventually she nodded. He was sure it wouldn't be the last time they talked about this, but at least her tears were long gone. He gave her an encouraging smile. "Good. Now..." He let go of her hands abruptly, but only so he could push himself to his feet. "We should probably go somewhere else." He extended a hand to her, in order to help her up, which she accepted without hesitation. "I imagine you don't want to see Stacey's face again for a while. If she really has gym class right now, and Max didn't kill her, then we probably shouldn't be near the field, just in case."

He pulled her to her feet, and as she was lightly patting dust off her jeans (not that he was looking, mind you), she muttered, almost under her breath, "Stacey won't be in PE today, anyway."

Mike frowned in confusion. She sounded so certain. "How do you know that?"

She paused her movements abruptly, like she hadn't intended to say that out loud and had only just realized she did. She looked at Mike hesitantly, like she had something she didn't want to admit, even to him. It made him worry again. "El?" he prompted.

She bit her lip lightly before she finally spoke. "I tripped her with my

powers and she smacked her face against a desk." She quickly looked down, as if she was too embarrassed to hold his gaze anymore. "I think she broke her nose. They took her to the infirmary."

Mike briefly remembered overhearing something about that while he was in line at the cafeteria, but at that point he hadn't had enough information to put two and two together. From the way El was acting, it was like she was ashamed of her own behavior, which he figured had something to do with the fact that she used her powers. Hopper's main rule now that Eleven was finally out in the world was, after all: "Do not use your powers in public."

It was a rule they all agreed with because it was risky; if anyone noticed anything odd and figured it out, El could be in danger again. But Hopper also wanted to make sure El understood that she couldn't abuse her abilities. It was understandable to use her powers in extreme circumstances, life-or-death situations, to defend her life or her friends', but it was unfair to use such power to win petty arguments with innocent people who didn't know and couldn't defend themselves. Even if they were jerks.

And yet... Mike couldn't find within himself even one ounce of sympathy for Stacey. He couldn't help but laugh. "You're amazing," he said between chuckles, shaking his head in amusement.

She had seemed startled at his unexpected reaction initially, but as the words came out of his mouth, her expression changed. She took a small step closer, her big brown eyes peering up at him like she didn't quite believe what he just said was true, but she *wanted* it to be, so much. "You really think so?" she asked tentatively.

Her hopeful tone made his heart skip a beat, because he'd said that without even really thinking about it. He didn't need to. The fact that she was amazing was something completely obvious to him; a self-evident truth that he'd recognized from the very first day he met her. She was so special in an undeniable way— not just because of her powers but also because of *her*, and everyone who knew her could see that, even if she herself couldn't.

He took hold of her right hand, so warm and delicate in his. "Of *course* I do. El..." He smiled at her. "You're the most incredible person

I have ever known. You're the most incredible person I *will ever* know. I have no doubt about that."

With the hand that wasn't holding hers, he touched the end of a strand of hair that was just resting on her shoulder, tenderly curling it around his finger. "I wish you could see yourself like I see you," he breathed out almost subconsciously, his gaze transfixed on the swath of brown against the pale skin of his palm. "Because then... you'd know."

He moved closer so that they were standing just a few inches apart. "It's like..." He took a breath. "Every time you're near me, it's like my heart wants to beat out of my chest," he revealed through a suddenly parched throat.

He was pretty sure his mouth was running without any input from his brain by that point, but he couldn't do anything about it. She was just so close, and so... so beautiful, swollen eyes and red nose and all, it was wreaking havoc on his senses.

"Every time I see you smile..." He kept going, lost in her eyes, emotions pulled out of him by her nearness. "Every time I hear you laugh... it's like seeing the sun come out after an entire day of rain," he explained in the only way he could the elation her happiness inspired in him.

He pulled their joined hands up to rest against his chest, and he saw her eyes widen when she realized that his heart was, indeed, pounding madly inside his chest cavity. "Every time I touch you," he pointed out, squeezing her hand, "every time I hold your hand, it's like there's electricity running through my veins."

"Mike..." she whispered, gaze locked with his. She was hanging onto his every word, rapt, and Mike couldn't keep himself from touching her. He lifted a hand to cradle her cheek, prompting a barely-there gasp to escape her mouth.

"And every time I look at you, it's like..." That's when the words started failing him, mainly because his breath was lodged somewhere in his throat, refusing to leave his body unless it was in a sigh into her mouth. "I just... I feel..."

He needed to kiss her. He needed to kiss her so badly at that moment, it was like a physical ache. He couldn't stop himself from claiming her lips any more than he could stop his heart from beating. So he leaned in.

She met him halfway.

She pulled her hand away from his so she could lift it to the back of his neck, and his own went almost unbidden to her waist, so he could pull her closer. This was different to any kiss they'd shared in the past, more like a series of kisses that kept going because they were unwilling to part from each other for more than a fraction of a second. Caressing lips, open mouths, and pleasant shivers running down their spines.

He changed the angle of his head with a breathless exhale before he dove into the softness of her mouth again, thinking *I could stay like this forever*.

It was not to be, though.

"Excuse me! You two, there!"

They sprung apart almost automatically, eyes wide and cheeks red as they caught sight of Mr. Carr, the boys' Gym teacher, making his way toward them, a stern expression on his face. "Well, look here. Sneaking out to make out behind the bleachers, huh?" he claimed when he was close enough to them not to have to yell.

Mike, who was sure his face had never been hotter in his entire life, exchanged a panicked gaze with El before turning back to the teacher. "W-we weren't—" he started, trying to come up with a decent alternative explanation on the fly. "I can explain, I swear— we were just— Jane wasn't feeling very well, so I was just—"

"Trying to cure her non-existent illness by giving her mouth-to-mouth?" Mr. Carr was having none of it. "Try a better excuse next time, Wheeler," he added with a raised eyebrow as he pulled a pad of disciplinary notes from his pocket. "You're both supposed to be in class, anyway."



Mike cringed. He'd been so busy trying to cheer El up that he'd totally forgotten about school. The bell had probably rung ages ago. He was so stupid. And to get caught by *Mr. Carr*, of all people? There was a *reason*, other than his utter lack of athletic ability, why he hated PE. He was never going to live this one down.

The teacher quickly finished writing in his pad and handed each of them a disciplinary note. "Detention. Tomorrow. 8 am." Mike almost groaned. He hadn't gotten detention since middle school; his mother was going to kill him. Then he snuck a glance at El, who was staring at the note in her hands in something like confusion, and felt even worse. She'd never received a disciplinary note since she started school, and now because of him, she had detention, too. *Shit*. Hopper was going to have his head.

"Now, back to class," Mr. Carr dismissed them like they were no better than stray cats.

"But Chief Hopper's coming to pick her up—" Mike tried again.

"I don't care if you have a meeting with the Queen of Sheba, Wheeler," Mr. Carr interrupted him again because, of course, when had the man ever let him off easy? "All I care about right now is that in the next five seconds you go somewhere that isn't right here and get out of my hair."

*Not that you have much left of it*, Mike almost blurted out in vexation, but thought better of it. "Yes, sir," he retorted instead, grabbing hold of El's forearm and pulling her away from the bleachers, toward the main building. Once they were out of hearing range, he turned to her and muttered, "Sorry."

She didn't look at him, but pulled her arm back so she could hold his hand, instead. "What are you sorry for?" she asked, a slight smile forming on her lips. "None of this is your fault."

Recognizing his own words used against him, he chuckled. "Smartass," he retorted, which made her giggle. With a lightness that only El could conjure back in his heart, they made their way to the school's office, where Hopper would have to sign her out before he took her back home.

Mike didn't mind waiting with her. It's not like he could get in any more trouble for skipping sixth period, anyway.

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**Notes:** The stories in this "quiet moments" series are generally conceived as standalones and as a rule I try to keep them that way, but I *may* write a sequel about the detention if I can come up with a good idea for a quiet moment to fit within that context? Keyword being *may*; this isn't written in stone, and I'm not making any promises, and even if I do write it, it probably won't be the very next story I write. But I do love me some *Breakfast Club*, so... what can I say, the urge is great.

Meanwhile, as far as this story is concerned, the thing Max was doing with the tab of her Coke can was something we girls used to do when I was young—you twist the tab back and forth while going down the alphabet, and the letter you're on when the tab breaks off is supposed to be the initial of your true love. (Do girls still do that? I feel old.) Most soft drink cans had switched from pull tabs to push tabs (the ones they still currently use) by the late 70s/early 80s.

Fruit Roll-Ups are a fruit-leather-type snack (though really it's mostly sugar) from Betty Crocker that started being sold in 1983. An I-beam is a type of beam that has horizontal bars (flanges) at the top and bottom, so it looks like a capital I; not all bleacher structures have I-beams, but sometimes the big ones do. *The Old Man and the Sea* is a novel by Ernest Hemingway that absolutely traumatized me for *life* when I had to read it for school, and therefore I must now inflict that pain on any fictional high-schoolers I ever write about. Cyndi Lauper is an iconic pop artist who rose to fame in the 80s, most notably for her songs "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" and "Time After Time." Mr. Carr is named after Coach Carr from *Mean Girls*.

I have to stop making Eleven cry in every other fanfic I write. I feel awful when I do that. Oh, and no offense to the girl who played her in episode 2x09, but I freaking hate Stacey's guts. Ugh. Also, I did not title this fic after the Backstreet Boys song of the same name, but in

hindsight I can admit that it actually fits— the sappiest song ever written goes well with the sappiest fic ever written. xD

Also, important question: Where does "Mayfield" come from for Max's last name? I went with it because it seems to be the general consensus, but I haven't actually seen it confirmed anywhere. I thought it was from *Beyond Stranger Things*, but I went back and re-watched episodes 2 and 6, and I still didn't hear anyone say it. Is it in the credits or something? Or is it just from the IMDb listing? I'd really like to know.